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S E R M O N

P R E A C H ' D

Before the K I N G,

A T

St. *JAMES-CHAPEL*,

On the 10th. of *February* 169⁴.

B E I N G

The First SUNDAY in L E N T.

By the Right Reverend Father in GOD,
GILBERT Lord Bishop of SARUM.

L O N D O N,

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P R I N T E D,

By His Majesty's Special Command

252

Good

5/6/

2 COR. VI. I.

We then, as Workers together with him, beseech you also, that ye receive not the Grace of God in vain.

THESE Words as they are a part of the Epistle for the day, so they do contain the chief Subject of our Labours, and of your Duty : we as fellow Labourers (for *with him* is not in the Greek) are to unite all our endeavours, to beseech you not to neglect this great Salvation, nor to receive in vain that Grace and Favour which is offered you in the Gospel : that is, not to hear it without the Impressions that it ought to make, and the effects that it ought to have upon you.

In the end of the former Chapter St. Paul seems to raise our Character very high. He calls us *Ambassadors for Christ*. An Ambassador is the second Character

rafter of dignity in the World, because it represents the first. We come in the Name and stead of our Great Master. *We pray men in Christs stead, and as tho God did beseech them by us.* But that we might not swell too much upon so sublime a designation, we are taken down again in the words of my Text : we are *Workmen, and Builders,* and ought to be esteemed for our Works sake, as we labour faithfully, and diligently. We are called to labour and not to authority, to perswade and not to command. The chief Subject that we are to be employed in, is to perswade men to be reconciled to God, and not to receive his Grace in vain.

One might think, that this was an easie task, in which we could not doubt of our success. What Criminal under the arrests of Justice, who has the time of his Execution in view would, need great perswasions to accept not only of a pardon, but of favour. This would go so naturally, that it would seem a superfluous labour to use strong arguments to prevail upon him. Were we but sensible of the load of sin, and guilt that is upon us, what humble supplicants would we be for *Grace*, in stead of needing motives to perswade us to accept of it.

The best method for us both to maintain the dignity of our Character, as *Ambassadors*, and to succeed

succeed in our Labours as *joynt Workmen*, is to live
sensibly to the station we are raised to, to represent
as near as we can the vertues of him who sends us,
and to direct the perswasions that we offer to others,
so effectually to our selves, that the world may from
thence believe, that we know our Arguments to
be strong, because we our selves are convinced by
them. If they observe not this, they will have little
regard to all that we say: They will rather think,
that it is for the sake of our Character, or rather as
they will turn it, for the sake of our appointments,
that we study to set out this matter with good co-
lours, and a seeming strength of reason to others: but
if we our selves do not yield to it, they will
conclude, that we, who have opportunities to
meditate well on those matters, have found out the
weak sides of the Arguments, since we do not
yield to them, what noise soever we may make
in them, for the subduing and terrifying of o-
thers. The strokes of Art, and the charms of
Rhetorick do please rather than perswade. The
heart has a language peculiar to it self, which
is well perceived by the hearts of others: how
plain and neglected soever it may be, as to
the airs or graces of discourse. It will soften
and melt more than laboured or artificial Com-
posures. Mankind will judge of our hearts by

Ver. 3d.

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our actions rather than by our words. That we may effectually beseech others, we must carefully watch over our selves, that, according to the words which follow, we may *give no offence in any thing*, that we may neither give just grounds, nor even colourable preferences to others, to stumble by any thing that we may lay in their way: that so *our ministry may not be blamed*. The enemies of Religion will not think it enough to triumph over us, when we furnish them with such advantages; they will carry it further, and lay the blame, not where it ought to be laid, upon our persons: they will charge our Function with it, for they hate that more than our persons: we ought therefore to *approve our selves in all things* in the conduct of our lives, and in the discharge of our function: in *much patience*, even tho we should fall under great *afflictions*. By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: neither much cast down for the one, nor at all lifted up for the other: and upon the whole matter we ought to behave our selves so, that tho impious and wicked men may study to make us pass for Impostors and *deceivers*; yet we may be found to be *true*: to be men of Integrity and probity.

St. Paul says, *we beseech you also*: that is, not only the Heathens, but the Saints or Christians of *Corinth*,

rinth, not to receive this Grace in vain. They not only believed the Gospel, but were, when this Epistle was written to them, under deep Impressions of Sorrow, for those Disorders and Scandals, for which he had treated them so severely in his first Epistle to them: yet no good temper of theirs, could supersede the necessity of this exhortation: therefore he saies, *we beseech you also.* This is the end of our Ministry and the chief subject of our labours: therefore it is ever to be repeated, and to be alwayes insisted on, even to the greatest proficients, and in their best minutes. By *the Grace of God*: in the general signification of the word, is to be understood the love and favour of God; but more particularly that goodness and mercy of God, which is revealed to us in the Gospel, which in opposition to the Law of Moses is called *Grace*: *we are not under the Law but under Grace*: and the *Grace of God which bringeth salvation* 6 Rom. 4. hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godlily in this present world. 2 Tit. 11. To receive this Grace in vain, is, not to have that sense of it, nor to make those acknowledgments for it, or returns to it, that become us, and which it deserves.

So then the Subject of this Discourse shall be,

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1st. To

1st. To shew you what it is to receive the Gospel in vain, and who they are that are guilty of this.

2^{dly}. What are those arguments that we have to offer to the world to perswade them to *receive it not in vain*, but suitably to the truth and importance of it.

I come therefore now to consider, what it is to *receive this Grace in vain*; and what sorts of men are guilty of it? I shall name three sorts.

The 1st. Those do certainly *receive it in vain*: in the highest degree, who treat it with scorn, who make it the subject of their prophane mirth, and divert themselves with such Impieties, as an abused liveliness can furnish them with from any of the parts of it. This is the peculiar unhappiness of the present Age, that men are not contented to *receive this Grace in vain*, but they turn it into *lasciviousness*: they are not satisfied with Indulgences to their Appetites and Passions, unless they gratifie them so far, as to sacrifice Religion and that Veneration, which by the consent of all Ages and Nations, has been payed to sacred things, to them. But if the men of that sort will bear so serious a thing, as the arguing closely; this may be asked them, would they have all Mankind set free from all restraints? If this is a right of Humane Nature, all men have an equal claim

claim to it : Now what a thing would the World be, if men were let loose ; or rather if their Appetites and Passions were let loose, first on themselves, and then on all the World about them. God knows the restraints of Religion are but feeble things : yet as to some Matters, and in some Instances they have such influence, that without them the World would soon be turned into a Desert. Men would be as Beasts of prey, destroying and devouring one another : on the other hand what order and harmony, what confidence and mutual affection, what happiness in Families, and what peace in Neighbourhoods, would arise out of the sincere receiving of the Christian Religion and the submitting to its discipline ? Every man would have all those Duties payed him, which arise out of the relation of others to himself ; as he would become to all others every thing that in reason they could expect from him. The Doctrines of this Religion concerning God and his Attributes, concerning the Government of this World, and the prospect of another : the Theories concerning the Soul and a future State, and the Notions of good and evil, have in them such a majestick gravity, such a sublimeness, with the highest Ideas and the purest Thoughts that we are capable of, that in this respect there is nothing in Christianity, that

does not well agree with the most elevated Apprehensions that our Natures are capable of. The worship of this Religion is so free from all pageantry and vanity, so simple in the few Rites it proposes, so natural in the Acts that are commanded by it, and so easie in their performance, that take all the parts of this Religion together, the Morals, the Doctrines, and the Rituals of it, it is evident, that as every considering man will acknowledge, that the World could not be kept in order without any Religion; so there is no other that can be in any sort compared with this: and therefore every man must soon see cause to wish it were true: and to be inclined to believe a Doctrine that has nothing in it unworthy of the Divine Nature, and that does conduce so eminently to the perfecting of the Humane Nature. This is enough to dispose men to believe, that it may be true, even tho' they could not bring evident proofs to perswade them that it is so.

But when that stands so clearly attested, when the Miracles of *Moses* and the Prophets, of Christ and his Apostles, were wrought in the sight of so many witnesses, and in such eminent and uncontested Instances, which overcame the World so fast, that without any humane supports, nay in opposition to all the Powers on Earth, this Do-

ctrine

Erine being received in so many remote Provinces, so early, by such numbers, who suffered much for it, and were ready to have suffered more ; when I say, all this is well considered, here was a just reason once to receive this Gospel, upon the Authority that proved those, who delivered it, to have been sent of God. There is no reason to demand the continuance of such wonderful Works : such a rule of Life, and such a method of Worship, do so effectually recommend this Religion, that we ought to acquiesce in those Proofs that were once given : for whatsoever is once well and fully proved, ought never to be questioned again ; unless there is somewhat in the nature of the thing, that gives a perpetual and just ground of doubting.

So much in the way of Argument against this sort of men : As to perswasion, all that needs be offered to them, is to appeal to their own minds, if they do not feel a secret joy, when they do a good action, and as sensible a horror when they commit some bad ones : if in dangers and fears, they do not feel somewhat within them, that drives them to God and Religion, if the prospect of death does not terrifie them at some times, and if the horrors of Conscience grow not sometimes too hard even for them to bear ; and that after all
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their Practices upon themselves to stifle and extinguish the Rests of Education, and the dread of invisible Objects? If they will not hearken to those secret Intimations, that they feel within themselves, if they will neither consider what the World would be if there were no Religion in it, nor what it must be if men were sincere Christians; if they will neither consider the reasons that are offered for our Religion, nor the whole frame of it in it self, but will only fix on a few particulars, on which they think they can lay their censure and feed their mirth, all that remains to be said to such, is, *Let him that is filthy be filthy still: for if our Gospel is bidden, it is to them that are lost, and whom the God of this World hath blinded.*

22 Rev.

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2 Cor. 4.

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A Second sort of those who receive this Grace in vain, are they who outwardly profess it, nay go into Parties and Factions, and become hot and angry about it, and yet do by no part of their whole behaviour shew that they inwardly believe it: since they live as if they did not; and that with relation to many of the most express Rules and Principles of it. From hence it is, that the men of the former sort conclude, that these men believe it as little as they themselves do: and they infer from thence that since Religion does not bring its Votaries to that, which is both the clearest and the

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most valuable part of it, therefore it can neither have that Truth, nor yet that strength in it, that is pretended, otherwise it would shew it self in more real effects.

It is but too true, that the much greater part of those who are called Christians, are a reproach to their profession: the higher their pretensions are, the reproach is the greater: and it never has such a certain effect for the hardning of others, as when any of our Profession give just colour to this. The world observes us carefully as well as maliciously: and will lose none of the advantages that we give them: they wait for our halting, and will not only Insult upon it, with respect to our selves, but will turn it against the doctrine that we profess with our mouths, while we deny it by our lives. These certainly who know their Masters will and do it not, shall be beaten with many stripes: they must expect the deepest portion in the miseries of the next State, even the portion of Hypocrites, who have been all their lives acting a part: for how ill soever they have acted it, how thin soever the disguise and mask has been, yet still they have passed for Christians, and have perhaps acted with some zeal, in some of the concerns of that Religion, and yet have all the while lived so, as

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to make all the world conclude, that they believed nothing of it : but yet after all this is confessed,

This ought not to strengthen the libertines in their Impieties : since it is certain, that men may be really convinced of some truths, and yet either thro want of attention to them, or thro the power of some of their appetites or Interests, they may pursue such a course of life as is most directly contrary to that, which they are well persuaded of. Men do know, that a life of riot, a career of Vice, and a profusion of Expence must either shorten their daies, or make them miserable : what they see in others, and what they observe in themselves, do assure them that Luxury will both exhaust their fortunes, and bring pains and intollerable diseases upon them : yet they go on, and pursue their vices ; and that even after they have felt the ill effects of them, both on their persons and estates : so that they see all must end in beggary and rottenness, or some violent pains, under the returns of which they must languish out their daies. Their ill habits are gone too deep and become too dear to them to forsake them : so that daily observation shews us, that men may really believe some truths, tho their lives seem to be a continual contradiction to them.

But after all, though such an outward form of Religion can be of little advantage to those who put it on; it is a great Blessing to a Nation to be brought under even the Profession of the Belief of it: For whatsoever is received as a National Religion, if it is generally known, it must have such an influence on the Laws and Constitutions, the outward forms and decencies of such a Nation, that the Nation must come under another face, even by that outward appearance. In *Athens* and *Rome*, the two most refined pieces of Heathenism, though Wit and Eloquence, Reason and Philosophy seemed to rise among them as high as any Age can pretend to: and a good Constitution; publick Liberty, a generous Education, Courage, the love of Vertue, and the love of their Country, seemed to raise them as high as Human Nature unassisted can go; Yet the Corruption of their Religion, the Fables concerning their Gods, the Brutalities of their Worship, together with all the ill consequences of it, were too hard for their Philosophy and good Government: the Corruption of their Religion went too deep, and was too early received, to be overcome by Speculation or Management. This their Philosophers saw well; and so they despaired of Reforming the World, unless those things could have been first Corrected.

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The reverse of this appears, even in the most degenerated State of *Christendome*; which with all its faults, has another face than either *Paganism* or *Mahometanism*: and that appears yet more eminently, according as the Knowledge of this Religion has been spread. The outward appearance of *Christendome* is very far different now, from what it was before the Reformation; in which it was kept up from the world, and no more of it was let out than what was thought necessary to feed Superstition, and to maintain the Authority of those who had the Secret in their hands. Now things have another face; and though the greater part of those who are called Christians can expect nothing from it themselves, but an aggravated Condemnation, since they dishonour it more by their ill Practices than they can pretend to support it by their Zeal; yet the publick Profession, and the general knowledge of it, are great Blessings to Mankind.

A third sort of those who receive this Grace in vain, are persons who with the Profession of Religion, do think themselves bound to join some Practices agreeing with it; but by reason of some false Principles, and through a vicious indulgence to their Sloth and other ill Inclinations, they form so low an Idea of a Religious life, and make such abatements to themselves from that, to which at first

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view this Doctrine seems to oblige them, that they bring it down to a very small matter; to an external compliance with Forms and Institutions; to some outward Regularity; and some other easie Practices, by which they pacify their own Minds; they lay such Terrors as may be apt to arise upon them; and they form such Theories of the Attributes of God, and the Mercies of the Gospel, that they grow to be easie under those low degrees.

It is certain, That the main design and chief effect of Religion, is to Purify our Hearts, to Reform our Natures, to Restrain our Inclinations, our Appetites and Passions, and to spread such an influence through our whole Lives, through all our Powers, and in all our Actions, that the world may from thence, as from the evidentest as well as the powerfullest Argument, be convinc'd both of the beauty and force of this Religion. The Christian Religion in its true Purity, and as it is received among us, is so stript of all those outward appearances of Pompous and Costly, of severe or cruel Performances, that unless it reforms our Natures and our Lives, it has not enough in it to feed and support that false quiet that Superstition may give.

A Heathen that Sacrific'd his Child, or Ruin'd his Fortunes to do honour to his Idol; a Mahometan that Fasts severely, that goes on chargeable Pilgrimages, that exposes himself to all Dangers, believing the certainty of Fate; a Jew that paid Tythes of all his encrease, besides many costly Sacrifices and Oblations; that Travelled oft up to *Jerusalem*, and that was not to lend upon Interest; and one of the *Roman* Communion, that goes through severe Penances, and makes great Endowments for the Honour of a Saint, or the Redemption of a Soul; all these, I say, suffer so much in their Religion, it puts them both to so much Cost and Pain, that they may come to persuade themselves that it may be put to their Account, that God may be pleased, and Sins or Defects may be Forgiven upon their doing such Services, that put them to so great a Charge, and condemn them to such Severities. But as to us and our Religion, What can we expect from it, if it has not a real influence upon our Hearts and Lives? Can we think that for our going sometimes (seldome God knows) to Prayers; our Assisting, that is being present, rather than joining with any Devotion at them; that our giving the Hearing, often a very wandering one, to a few Discourses; and our coming to Sacrament upon some great occasions, in compli-
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ance with Law or Custom, rather than out of true Devotion; Can, I say, any man have such high thoughts of such Nothings, such mean and dead Performances, or can he have such low thoughts of God and Religion, as to imagine that any value can be set on them? It is certain, that so simple and plain a Religion as ours is, which lays so little cost or trouble on us, can be of no value in the sight of God; it has not so much as an outward appearance considerable enough to give a false quiet: so that man who knows that his Religion has not its real effects on him, has no reason to flatter himself upon that account. Indeed such a half Religion, as it lets in upon a man the belief of the Principles of it, so it lays him open to all the Checks and Terrors which arise out of these. It is strong enough to teach him his Duty, to make him know his Sins, and to apprehend the terrible Consequences of them; but it does not compleat its Work; it gives him only the Terrors, but lets him not in to the Joys of true Religion. He does not live in that purity, as to feel the Sense of a good Conscience; nor has he that right to the Promises of the Gospel, which may settle in him a firm confidence in God, with a full assurance of his Love, and an entire dependance on his Providence. The Terrors of Guilt must make him start often, and
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the Corruptions that he feels still within him, are to him like those secret Pains and Diseases, that though they break not out into violent Symptoms, yet are sensibly felt, and do imbitter our Lives, in spite of the highest affluence of wealth and pleasure that may compass us about on every side.

After all, such a low state of Religion, though it is not to be rested on, yet is not to be neglected; it may be a good beginning, and carry us on to better things: A fire may arise from a spark, and a little Leaven may come to leaven the whole lump: Men of low attainments ought to know that they are but low; and to press forward, for getting the things that are behind, reaching to those that are before them.

To conclude this Head; As we have seen different Classes of men who do *receive this grace in vain* so in opposition to them, those who do *not receive in vain*, are they who are firmly persuaded of the truth of it; and that not from the implicitness of Education, or Custom, but upon Principles, after a due consideration of the matter. They being thus assured of the truth of it, apply themselves in earnest to frame the inward disposition of the mind, their Designs and settled Resolutions, nay even their Wishes and sudden Thoughts, into

conformity to the Spirit of the Christian Religion. They become inwardly humble and modest, charitable and good-natur'd, patient and gentle, serious and devout; they have moderate designs as to this world, and are contented with that state of life, and those Circumstances that God shall think fit to chuse for them: They consider this World as a Pilgrimage, and themselves as Strangers in it; and have their Eyes and Aims raised to a blessed Immortality beyond it; and so they lay down a stedfast Resolution to allow themselves in no sin, nor to compound for any one by affecting higher degrees of zeal in any of the other parts of Religion. Thus their mind is framed within. To this Temper they join an exactness in their whole deportment, free from affectation or superstition. They begin at the most indispensable Rules of Vertue; they are sincere and true, honest in all their dealings, and faithful to all their Promises; they are harmless and innocent, shew neither envy nor spite to others, nor allow themselves the liberty of Calumny or Detraction: They are chaste, sober and temperate; ready not only to do good to all, but particularly to render good for evil: And in all these things they do not content themselves with low degrees, but study to shine; not to gratify Vanity, or to be observed; but to
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set a pattern to others, and to do all the honour that they can to their holy Religion.

But alas! if this is the extent of *not receiving this grace in vain*, how few are they who come within this Character? Oh where are they to be found? Some there are, God be thanked for it, in whom Religion shews both how amiable, and how effectual it is. It is indeed an amazing and melancholy Consideration, that the number of them should be so small; nor does any thing prove more evidently the monstrous depravation of Human Nature, than that a Religion composed of such Principles, and supported by such an Author, should prevail so little, and have so feeble an influence, even over those who seem to deliver themselves up to its discipline.

This carries me to the second Point to which I propos'd to speak, to wit, What are those Arguments that we have to offer the World, to persuade them *not to receive this grace in vain*.

The 1st is imported in the very word it self; that it is *Grace*, and Favour. Generous minds value themselves on this; That how firm soever they may be against Terrors or Threatnings, they are easily conquer'd by the methods of love, and of kindness. They are rather too feeble here, and too apt to be

be overcome by them. If we do either consider our own guilt, or the Majesty of that God who offers this *Grace* to us, we will have tenderer impressions of this matter. I know the profane Tribe look upon all the sad reflections that men may be induced to make on their past lives, as the fumes of Melancholly, and as vapours that arise from cross Accidents, or uneasy Circumstances. If indeed we thought that a few sad Acts could compound matters with God; be as a sort of reparation to discount all other Reckonings; this were a very mean thing, and a great foundation for Superstition. But when reflections on past Disorders are only meant in order to the humbling of our selves, to the making us claim to, and value the Mercies of God the more, and to the obliging us to be more watchful over our selves for the future, and more tender towards the failings of others; sad Reflections so managed, and so directed, must give us another view of things, and make us see our selves in other colours. These, while they sink us under the apprehensions of what we have deserved, so they must raise in us a high sense of the Grace and Pardon offered us in the Gospel; such persons must *love much* 7. Luke in proportion to the sense that they have of the 47. *much that is forgiven them.*

If to this we add the consideration of the method,

thod by which access was given us to this *Grace* in which we stand, it must carry us to very high thoughts of it : when we see that Holy and Divine Person, who delivered this Religion to the World, in whom the *Fulness of the Godhead dwelt* ; who was not only full of *Grace and Truth* as Man, but was the *only begotten Son of God*. Words that carry such an august sound and sense in them, that they must beget in us the highest Idea's possible of the dignity of his Person ; that this Person, I say, was made a Sacrifice for us, and went through such a black and ignominious Scene of Sufferings ; that at all this distance from that time, the History of them cannot yet be read without giving great tenderness to every serious Reader ; and that all this was done only to reconcile us to God, to obtain to us the pardon of our Sins, and the favour of God. When all this is duly considered, it must raise in us a very deep and sensible Gratitude ; it must create in us a just horror of those Sins which God would not pardon without giving so signal a Demonstration of his abhorrence of them, when he laid so great a load of suffering on him, who was thereby to become the Mediator and Intercessor for them. So that we have tractable Natures, that can be conquered by that, which the noblest minds have thought

an honour to be overcome by; the goodness of God in offering so free a Pardon on such easy terms on our side, and by so hard a purchase to him who procured it for us, will make such impressions on us that will receive and value this *Grace* as we ought, and will study to make those Returns for it which become us.

Another Consideration that may justly prevail on us to give this *Grace* a suitable reception, is the easy Conditions on which it is offered to us. Here an Objection does presently arise: Can such a course of strict Obedience and severe Holiness be thought an easy matter, while all our Faculties are under such feebleness and disorder, that they do revolt against every part of it, and seem indeed incapable to bear it?

Here a distinction is carefully to be made between the Law that is laid upon us, and the condition upon which we can hope for a share in this *Grace*. We are under a Law of Universal Holiness; but the condition of the *Covenant of Grace* is a sincere Obedience. The meaning of which is not, that we are only obliged to a sincere Obedience, and not to an entire one. The whole Law of God obliges us to the utmost extent that the Gospel has carried every branch of it; so that we sin against God, and provoke his wrath, when

we fail in any part of our Duty. But on the other hand, the Gospel is not of the nature of such an Act of Grace, as pardons all former Faults, but gives no hope in case of a new Disobedience ; it does not only pardon all that is past, but it encourages us to continue in the service of God, tho we should relapse, as well as it accepts of our sincerity ; and it makes abatements for those Frailties that hang about our Natures, and that do often prevail over us : yet this does not alter the nature of things ; it does not dissolve our obligations, nor make such actions no sins ; it only offers a continued Pardon, not subject to forfeiture upon our offences. Nothing but a deliberate course in sin excludes us from this *Grace* ; and even in that case we are not condemned to Despair, but there is room for Repentance. Therefore we are not to imagine, that sincere Obedience is all that we are bound to ; for if it were so, we should not be guilty of *Sin*, by such offences as may consist with it. From hence it appears, that we are still under an obligation to an entire Obedience ; so that when we say, that a sincere Obedience is the condition of this Covenant, we do not disannul the Law, nor its binding force ; we only hold forth the continued offer of the Pardon in the Gospel notwithstanding our Sins, upon our repenting of them.

and forsaking them in the main course of our life.

Every man that deals honestly with himself, must soon be made to confess, That a sincere Obedience is not so far out of the reach of human Nature, but that he may hope to attain to it, especially with the help of those Aids that are offered to him. And as every man knows what it is seriously to mind his Health and his Affairs, even when he is guilty of some Errors and Omissions in it; he knows what it is to pursue a Science, or be employed in a Trade, even when he does not bend his utmost Application to it, nor use all possible Diligence in it; yet when it is that which he labours in, and does constantly follow, that becomes the Business of his life: He is sensible of many Errors that he makes, he corrects them, and studies to perfect himself by all the improvements that come in his way. From hence it will be easie to judge of our sincerity, whether we mind Religion with that honest care, and hearty application with which we pursue all our other concerns.

The easiness of this condition, appears yet more fully in those supplies by which we are enabled to perform it. Secret Assistances are promised to us; but how they are conveyed, and how they have their effect upon us, is not easie for us to apprehend: Who can tell how it comes that our Food does animate and exhilarate our Minds? Or
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that the Dew of Heaven should make the Earth Fruitful? So how much soever Prophane Minds may lay out their Wits, to make all this pass for the delusion of the Imagination, or for a false pretension; yet all Good men may be appealed to, whether they do not feel that upon their pursuing those methods that are offered in the Gospel; they do perceive such a change to grow upon them, that how insensible soever the steps of it may be, yet the whole, after some time becomes very apparent: They feel such a new turn in their Minds, such an alteration in their Inclinations and Aversions, that they become, as it were, moulded a-new; their Thoughts have another ply, and their Mind another form. The unaccountableness of the way in which this is brought about, is no just prejudice against the truth of it: For as Air, though the weakest and most yeilding of all the bodies we know, yet is sometimes driven with such mighty force, that nothing can resist it; so our Saviour has compared the unseen motions of the Divine Spirit, to the invisible direction of the Air: Such operation have those secret Influences, that men are transformed by them; and since what exalts the power of our Faculties, does at the same time weaken the opposition that can be made to them, by the difficulty of any performance; this removes the prejudice that may be raised from the feebleness of our

Joh. 3.8.

our Natures, and the hardness of the conditions that are laid upon us. It is our sloth and unwillingness to undergo those Labours that we know our selves capable of, that makes the difficulties appear to be Insuperable.

We must confess that we have seen such instances of the Power of Religion, in some Persons raised to the highest Circumstances of Life, and who lived under the most constant observation; that by those we may be convinced how far Human Nature can go, or rather how far Religion can carry it. We have seen them shine with such a lustre, as well as influence, that by those apparent proofs we are forced to acknowledge, That those who attend to the methods that this Religion prescribes, and do closely pursue them, rise up to a pitch that would scarce be credible, if it had not been evident beyond contradiction. To those instances we appeal the more confidently, that from them the world may judge how amiable a thing true Religion is; how excellent in it self, and how beneficial to Mankind. Such Impressions it is to be hoped will stick long, and will let us see what we may grow to be, if we are not wanting to our selves, and to those Assistances that are offered to us so freely, that we may have them if we but ask them earnestly, and use them carefully.

A third Argument by which we are to beseech
you

you to receive this grace, and to pursue the designs of it with due care, is, that our labour shall not be in vain. There is a vast reward laid up for them that walk worthy of this Gospel. And since it is of such infinite value, it is but suitable that our acceptance of the Gospel, and the effect it has upon us, should bear some proportion to our expectations from it, and to those hopes that are held forth to us by it. There is nothing more certain, than that in every wise Constitution there ought to be a proportion kept between the Rewards that are offered, and those Services for which they are proposed; as the due encouragements to them, and as returns for them. Even the highest Generosity and Magnificence of bounty, must be conducted by this rule; for the proposing vast Rewards for slight matters, will always betray great want of judgment, in not setting a true value on things, either on the Rewards, or the Services, or perhaps on both: The Rewards may rise vastly above the true value of the Service; and it is fit they should do so, that men may be duely animated and heated by them; but then the Services must with relation to him that does them, be in proportion as great for him to do, as the Rewards are for him who gives them.

The Rewards that our Religion proposes, are certainly far above all the Services that we can do:

And

And yet it does not derogate from the Infinite Wisdom of God to offer them to us; because the Services that he Commands in order to our obtaining them, are the highest that we are capable of. But to offer such Rewards to such slight Services, as the taking up of a Name, and a Profession, the espousing of some Opinions, the being regular in some Forms, and the exterior parts of our deportment; all this, as it is a mean thing in it self, so it is the insincere acting of a part; and therefore it cannot be supposed, that a God who is Infinitely Wise and Holy, would propose such a Reward to such Services that are so far below the Capacities and the Faculties that he has planted in us. But when we apply our selves sincerely to his Service, when we do set all our Powers to it, and give up our thoughts and studies, our time and our care to know and to do his Will; when we perceive that we make Religion the business of our Lives, and pursue a constant Obedience to the Laws and Will of God Seriously and Constantly; then since this is all that our Natures are well capable of, it may be highly suitable to the Infinite goodness of God, and to the vast Regard that he has to the Death and intercession of Christ, to offer us Unspeakable Rewards for such Services, which tho they are mean in themselves, and add nothing to him, yet are the highest that we are capable of. This is therefore ve-

ry clear, that the greatness of the Reward ought to be a most powerful Argument to persuade us to carry our Religion as far as we can, and not to rest contented with Low Measures, and Lifeless Performances.

Now that we may have some Idea of the value of this recompence of reward that is offered us, let us a little consider our own Natures, and see what Imaginable Perfections we are capable of. Bodies of great Purity and fineness of Composition, so fix'd as to be subject to no Wast, and liable to no Necessities; and so well Temper'd as to suggest to us no bad Thoughts; that are capable of a great quickness of Motion, and of enduring a perpetual bent of the Mind: In a Word, such Bodies as we can imagine our Animal Spirits would be, if they were no more volatile but fix'd, seem to be one Ingredient in the most Happiness that we are capable of. Another may be, that our Minds should be fill'd with the clearest Ideas of Truth, of the nature of all things; and above all, of that Supreme Mind that both gave Being and still continues it to all other things. Those Ideas must be ever present with us; and all the Inferences from them must be as easily Made, and as constantly Remembred, as we do see with our Eyes, or do remember such things as have made the greatest Impressions upon us. Our Actions must be as certainly Determined by them, as the easiest things are now carried on by the Idea's that are the Clearest, and the

least Painful to us : A Sovereign love to the perfectest Being, and to every other being in proportion to its Approach or Resemblance of the Supream, must so intirely possess and overcome us, that we shall be always living and acting under the Power of that Noble and Active Principle, when there is a constant sense of loving the best Object, and of being beloved by it: when with all this, there is a constant Joy in the Reflections on all that men do, and a perpetual delight in it; when this is Enjoyed in Company with many other pure and perfect Minds who do all love one another, and rejoice together : And when there is joined to all this a clear sense of those Insupportable Miseries to which they had made themselves obnoxious, and from which they are for ever delivered : And to crown all, when they do certainly know that all must be Eternal, without End, or so much as an Interruption. Let all these be supposed to be joined together; and they make up all the Happiness that our Natures are capable of; besides what other Seeds of a further possible Happiness may lie in us, of which we can at present frame no true Idea.

This Composition of all the Ingredients of an imaginable happiness, as it carries nothing in any part of it that does not appear very possible, and that is not suitable to all our apprehensions and observations, so it does very perfectly agree with
the

1 Cor. the descriptions that this Religion, which has
 15. 43. brought life and immortality to light, has given us con-
 53. cerning it. Our bodies are to be raised in a state
 1 Joh. 3. of honour and power, incorruptible and immortal : We
 2. shall see God as he is, and know him as we our selves
 1 Cor. are known. And when that which is perfect shall come
 13. 10, that which is in part shall be done away ; and we shall
 12. be ever with the Lord , in the fellowship of Angels
 1 Theff. and of Saints. Are not these hopes and promises
 4. 17. sufficient to inflame our affections, and to quicken
 us to all the application and zeal possible ? It were
 a vain attempt, and unbecoming the dignity of
 the Subject, and of this Place, to pretend to add
 to or enlarge on these Arguments. They are so full
 and so clear ; there is that energy and conviction in
 them, that we must give over those, upon whom
 they have no effect, as persons too hard to be soft-
 ened, and too desperate to be reclaimed. Our Gos-
 pel may appear to them *weak and foolish* ; but to
 those who consider and judge more maturely, it is
 the power and the wisdom of God. Such it is, and such
 it will appear to be to all those who receive not his
 grace in vain. God grant it may not be our con-
 demnation, that light is come unto the world, but that
 we have loved darkness better than light, because our
 deeds are evil : But that as we have received the
 Gospel, so we may walk worthy of it, to the praise of his
 Holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

T H E E N D.

